



Ill-Starred Thirteenth Festival of Cannes

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Film Quarterly, Vol. 13, No. 4. (Summer, 1960), pp. 15-19.

Stable URL:

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Film Quarterly is currently published by University of California Press.

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enough directors who want to do this sort of film.

Incidentally, when will we get to see The Entertainer?

It will be released here the end of August. You must also notice *Saturday Night, Sunday Morning*, directed by Karel Reisz. He wanted to do it and had an idea about it, and we set it up for him to do. Albert Finney plays the lead—he's quite marvellous, will be the next great actor. Shirley Enfield (who plays Larry's girl friend in *The Entertainer*), a very talented actress, is also in it, and we have tried to keep a continuity of technical crew as far as possible—the whole unit will continue on *Taste of Honey*.

They all have an attitude in common, and work together in a certain way. The theme of the story is, roughly, the release of the week end. It is about a sort of rebel, a sort of anarchist, a sort of anti-authoritarian boy living in this terrible drab ghastly town, who is really against authority, against the Establishment. He sleeps around at the week end, gets drunk, creates wild scenes, and so on. Then he gradually matures, and channels his rebelliousness into a more potent form. He works in a large bicycle factory as a machinist. It's about work—the whole business of work in those towns, the sort of tensions it produces.

CYNTHIA GRENIER

Ill-Starred Thirteenth Festival of Cannes

Faced with the depressing quality of most of the twenty-seven competition films and the generally lack-lustre atmosphere of the Thirteenth Annual International Film Festival held at Cannes May 4–21 this year, one was sorely tempted to believe there was something to the malevolent power that superstition accords the number 13 after all.

There were, of course, a number of first-rate films, but the day by day average of pretentiousness or mediocrity stretching over nearly three weeks was pretty rough on the faithful filmgoer. Boosted in advance by the popular press as having the most scandalous collection of films ever presented in a festival, the actual projection revealed a singularly unappetizing and often downright dreary detailing of sexual vagaries. The range of deviation was unquestion-

ably wide: incest, rape, voyeurism, homosexuality, and seduction of a twelve-year-old. In this context adultery and prostitution appeared rather old hat. Let it not be thought, though, that any of these subjects were treated lightly or that any of the deviations were shown to have an agreeable side: all were seen from a heavily moral viewpoint.

The festival opened and closed with the showing of two long American films, both of which rather spectacularly bored the sophisticated, largely Parisian, audience. *Ben-Hur* for all its Oscars, its millions, and its monumental ballyhoo, provoked many a titter, and at its end won only the barest flutter of polite applause. The final film, *Savage Innocents*, a hybrid entered under Italian colors, directed by American Nicholas Ray, acted by Japanese Yoko Tani and



Grigori Tchoukhari's
BALLAD FOR A SOLDIER.

American Anthony Quinn, and shot in England and Greenland, was all about Eskimo life, and proved once more that there is no point in trying to depict a primitive society using highly civilized actors.

Between these two monumental duds, critics and public were subjected to films, many of which on paper looked promising indeed. Bergman, Buñuel, Antonini, Fellini, Munk, Dassin, and Tchoukhrai were all presenting their latest work. Of them all, only one, the Soviet Union's thirty-eight-year-old Grigori Tchoukhari, had the gratification of receiving a massive ovation for his film, *Ballad for a Soldier*. Interestingly enough, this was just about the only "wholesome" film in the whole festival. The story could hardly be more simple. During the last war, a boy gets a 48-hour leave to go home to repair his mother's roof for the winter. The film touchingly, directly recounts the adventures which prevent his reaching home until he has time only to embrace his mother and run to catch the truck taking him back to his army unit. The people shown are very real human beings, seen with compassion, wisdom, humor, and no sentimentality. The love of the boy and a young girl he meets on the train is treated with a rare delicacy and discretion. The sophisticated, elegant festival audience exited from *Ballad* eyes red and cheeks wet.

The second Soviet entry, a more subdued film by Joseph Heiftz, is a nearly perfect rendering of the Chekhov short story, *Lady with the Dog*,

which catches all the quiet anguish and frustration of the original. The transition from literature to the screen has seldom been better done.

Right up to the last day everyone confidently expected *Ballad for a Soldier* to walk away with the top prize, but instead Federico Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* received the coveted Golden Palm, leaving the Soviets with a rather meagre award for "the best national selection of films." Popular opinion had it that the Summit break-up in Paris had played its role in the distribution of prizes at Cannes.

Fellini's much heralded *magnum opus* of three and one-half hours of Roman society is uncontestably an ambitious, handsome, skilled piece of film-making. Its very ambitions and technical achievement, however, lead one to be particularly demanding of it, and ultimately it does not quite make it as a major, moral study of the problems of our age. Perhaps one of the reasons for its failure is that we never get to know enough about nor care enough for the hero-journalist to feel the necessary identification or pity at his gradual moral degradation. Also, there is the feeling that it is all a bit too facile, and not quite tough-fibered enough. Still, even with its faults, it is an important film.

The jury, which included American novelist Henry Miller, declined to award prizes to either Ingmar Bergman or Luis Buñuel, while paying tribute to their talent and the merits of their films.

The Buñuel, shot in English with American actors, *The Young One*, is a twenty-six-day rush job which uncomfortably mixes nearly equal doses of *The Defiant Ones* with *Lolita*. Even apart from the disparate elements of its plot, the film suffers from bad acting, bad dialogue, dull photography, and seemingly nonexistent directing. French critics, for whom Buñuel can do no wrong, hailed it as another of the master's major works. Foreign critics were rather less receptive.

The Bergman, *Virgin Spring*, is a harsh, bitter medieval tale told with brilliance. Since it ends with a miracle, many considered it a religious film, but I saw it rather as Bergman's first statement of affirmation. What is significant is more

the vow to build, to create than the actual miracle itself. Deceptively straightforward in storyline, the film has great complexity, some of which only appears on a second screening. An exceedingly graphic rape scene aroused many hostile public reactions, and indignant walk-outs. The International Film Critics Association awarded its prize to *Virgin Spring*.

L'Avventura by Michelangelo Antonioni, which shared the jury prize with the Japanese *Kagi* in a festival of controversial films, divided opinion the most violently. Hooted and booed during its screening, it rapidly won fervent supporters who, in the following days, termed Antonioni a master using the medium of film in a new, subtle, yet daring way. Others, including the writer, found the film an interesting experiment, desperately in need of cutting and expressive actors, and much more explicit direction. If people on the screen are going to be shown as being bored and leading boring lives, very great care must be taken not to simply bore the

audience by the too vivid re-creation of boredom.

The award to *Kagi* (or *Strange Obsession* as it was billed in English) for its audacity of subject and its plastic qualities mildly outraged the audience. The story of an impotent old man and his attempts to solve this problem, which finally result in the four principal characters dropping dead, it provoked a great deal of what everyone thought was unintentional laughter. The Japanese apparently had the last laugh as they revealed that the film was intended as *humour noire* and audiences in Tokyo laugh from beginning to end. This detail seems however to have been unknown to the Cannes jury at the time of the award-giving.

The festival had but two acknowledged comedies. One, the Polish entry, *Bad Luck* by Andrzej Munk, is a lively satire on all facets of Polish life from 1935 to the present. Including some fine savage swipes at Communist bureaucracy, it introduces a highly inventive and pro-

Monica Vitti
in
Antonioni's
L'AVVENTURA.





Kon Ichikawa's *KAGI*
with Machiko Kyo.

ficient young actor named Bogumil Kobiela.

The other comedy, *Never on Sunday*, entered for Greece, is the work of the expatriate American director, Jules Dassin. He has cast himself as a well-meaning American hero who finally discovers happiness in Greece by leaving people to live their own lives instead of trying to convert them to his way of thought. Merlina Mercouri as the object of his conversion activity gives a bravura performance as an Athens prostitute which won her the award for the best female performance. The rhythmic, compelling *boukouzi* music of the sound track has already become a great popular hit in Paris. The reception following the film was the liveliest in the history of the festival, complete with an imported Greek folk orchestra and five thousand ouzo glasses smashed in toasts.

France, which last year swept the prizes and made the New Wave practically a household word, had a strange trio of films this May. The official entry by a curious turn was *Amerique Insolite* (Offbeat America), a feature-length documentary by young François Reichenbach, who spent six months touring the United States, camera in hand. M. Reichenbach's view of America is affectionate and sympathetic. His poem is half thank-you note, half love poem to the country of which he will shortly be a citizen. Visually the film is very handsome indeed.

Of the other two French entries, Jacques Becker's *Le Trou* seemed deserving of some attention in the award department, it being his last film. The slowly detailed account of a near

break-out in a prison, this sober, well-shot film suffered from the presence of nonprofessional actors. Although well selected, they just couldn't deliver the goods in important scenes.

The third French film, *Moderato Cantabile*, finished barely in time for the festival, suffered from the negative, intensely female masochistic side of novelist Marguerite (*Hiroshima, Mon Amour*) Duras plus an excessively high-pitched performance by Jeanne Moreau. Peter Brook proved to be a thoroughly static theatrical director with no sense of film movement. The award which Miss Moreau shared with Miss Mercouri was considered to be more for all her other work than this particular film, but there was still many a boo when she rose for the prize.

Great Britain sent *Sons and Lovers*, which had two top-quality performances from two thoroughly reliable performers, Trevor Howard and Wendy Hiller, and some very distinguished photography; but somehow the character of the young man, Dean Stockwell, never took hold, and the film failed as a consequence.

For the rest of the feature competition films silence is kindest, with perhaps a passing mention for a sincere, honest try on the part of a young Spanish director, Carlos Saura with *Los Golfos*. The short films were amazingly poor in

Merlina Mercouri in Jules Dassin's
NEVER ON SUNDAY.



AMERIQUE INSOLITE: François Reichenbach's view from the beach.

quality. Only France, with *Les Enfants de Courant d'Air* by Edouard Luntz, with the brilliant Hungarian refugee Badel at the camera, had a really worthy entry.

Something went wrong with this Festival. Perhaps it was too long for the number of good films shown. Perhaps it was the absence of the usual glamorous stars and pretty starlets. Perhaps it was due to the mood created by the Paris Summit break-up. Or perhaps it was just the fact it was the thirteenth festival.



The Expensive Art

A Discussion of Film Distribution and Exhibition in the U.S.

The problem of the independent or unusual film in America is to an astounding extent a problem of distribution—as anyone attempting to secure backing for a film speedily discovers. Unless a film is sponsored by a company or government agency (which brings other handicaps in its train) its costs must be regained through some distribution mechanism: it must be taken to the exhibitors, and the exhibitors must take it to the audiences, who must see it and pay for doing so. This linkage is a symbiotic one: no element in it can exist without the others, and they stand or fall together.

Unfortunately, to date they have mostly fallen, so far as offbeat films are concerned. The dominant system of film distribution, keyed to the Hollywood product, has no place for the limited-audience film, and no established means of reaching specialized audiences. The art-house chains, while they have been growing

somewhat, cannot as yet offer a financial basis upon which independent production can be sustained, and the distributors who supply them with films cannot either.

Paradoxically, we might say that both the Hollywood and foreign-film distribution systems are too "efficient": they cannot afford the risks that are necessary if film art is to develop healthily in this country—the mutations, so to speak, of which many must be sacrificed that the growth of new forms may proceed. The task devolves upon those who will benefit from new films: the film-makers and their potential audiences.

What then is to be done?

The tasks are clearly formidable, for film is evidently a medium whose distribution and exhibition patterns tend strongly toward centralization and standardization. But it is essential that solutions be found if film is to become freer